Career Education in Schools: an International Perspective

A.G. Watts

A keynote address to the Biennial Conference of the Career Education Association of Victoria, held at Monash University, 4-6 December 2005 ('Careers at the Coalface')

Introduction

A recent report in the *Times Educational Supplement* in England quoted a woman entrepreneur addressing a sixth-form conference as saying: 'Sack them all… get rid of your careers teachers… they're rubbish.' The reason she gave was that: 'When I told my careers teacher that I wanted to be a mechanical engineer, she said "No, no, no, dear, no one will want to marry you."'[1]

Careers teachers and careers co-ordinators are used to this kind of story. It is a salutary indication of the complexity and sensitivity of the processes in which we are seeking to intervene, and of how easy it is to get it wrong. Yet career education and guidance should be one of the most important activities in any school. The choices that young people make determine the lives they lead, and the people they become. The skills and attitudes they acquire determine their capacity to construct their career. We need to be at least as professional in this area as in any other area of a school's work. Yet often we are not.

What I want to do this afternoon is to outline some different conceptions of a school's role in relation to career education and guidance. I will draw here on some work which Bill Law and I did some time ago, when we developed the DOTS analysis. I will try to update it by incorporating into it some of the findings of some recent international studies of career guidance in which I have been heavily engaged. These have included reviews conducted by OECD, the European Commission and the World Bank which together have covered no less than 37 countries around the world[2], and which are now being extended further by the European Training Foundation into the West Balkans and some Mediterranean countries. I will add to this some comments on different ways of organising careers work in schools, so that you can see how your work relates to that elsewhere. Finally, I will make a few more specific comments on recent developments in Australia and here in Victoria.

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[1] *Times Educational Supplement*, 11 November 2005.

[2] Watts, A.G. & Sultana, R.G. (2004). Career guidance policies in 37 countries: contrasts and common themes. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 4(2-3),* 105-122.

Conceptions of career education and guidance

When Bill Law and I carried out the research into careers work in schools on which the DOTS model was based[3], we found it useful to map schools in relation to a developmental model of changing conceptions of careers work. This model comprised four stages, each of which was divided into sub-stages. In my view it still provides a useful way of exploring the different ways in which we can think of the school's role, and their underlying assumptions. I hope you may find it useful to reflect upon where your own school sits within the model. The stages of the model are viewed as being additive: in other words, each stage adds to rather than replaces the preceding ones, though each also reshapes the whole.

Stage 1: Information

Some schools seemed to regard careers work as being basically concerned with information. What they implicitly say is: if we can provide adequate career information for pupils, they will be able to make career choices in a more effective way. Within this stage, we called the first sub-stage the 'cardboard box' sub-stage, because the most basic level – which I remember finding in one school – was simply to place all the leaflets and booklets in a cardboard box. Eventually, however, schools realise that they need to take the information out of the cardboard box, to check that it is reasonably comprehensive and up-to-date, to display it, and to make it accessible. This leads them to the 'library' and then the 'resource centre' sub-stages.

Information is of course absolutely necessary for effective career decision-making. But there must be important doubts about the extent to which it is sufficient. Careers work based solely on providing information makes five assumptions:

- That pupils are motivated to access the information.
- That they are capable of finding the information they need.
- That they are capable of understanding it.
- That they are capable of relating it to their own situation and needs.
- That they are capable to converting it into effective action.

All are big assumptions. If pupils are to use information effectively and convert it into effective action, most will need some personal support. This moves attention to the second stage: the interview stage.

Stage 2: Interview

The first sub-stage here is basically concerned with advice-giving. What happens is that the adviser talks to the individual pupil, collects some information about him or her

[3] Law, B. & Watts, A.G. (1977). *Schools, Careers and Community*. London: Church Information Office.

(perhaps, in some versions, using psychometric tests for this purpose), matches this information with the adviser's perceptions of the various pathways open to the pupil, and finally makes some appropriate recommendations.

Some schools argue that such interviews should be confined to those who request them or who are clearly undecided about which pathway to follow. This however assumes that those who think they know where they want to go have based their decisions on sound information and on a thorough scanning of the available alternatives. This assumption is highly questionable. Young people are constantly being asked by adults what career they are planning to enter. Many of them learn the value of having a script to get the adults off their backs. But this script may be based on misinformation or on a very superficial processing of a limited range of information. An interview can at least provide some reality testing and quality assurance.

Advice can certainly be of value. But it can also be hazardous, as in the example I quoted earlier. Even if the advice is informed and skilled, there must be important doubts:

- About whether an adviser, however competent, can adequately diagnose an individual's attributes and potential in the short interview which tends to be the norm in most schools.
- About the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the adviser's knowledge of the available pathways.

Even if these doubts are discounted, it seems likely that pupils who base their decisions on the advice of another will identify less with the decision, and take less responsibility for making it work: this may reduce both the effort they put into their chosen pathway and the satisfaction they derive from it. Moreover, they have learned little about the process of decision-making. The intervention has not helped them to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes which they can utilise again in their subsequent career development. The main learning may be that they have little control over their own destiny: that decisions have to be submitted to so-called 'experts' who will advise them what to do.

Such concerns about the dangers of directive advice can lead to an interest in developing a more counselling-based approach to interviewing. Here the role of the interviewer is not to diagnose individuals' attributes and make appropriate recommendations, but rather to help them articulate their own perceptions both of themselves and of the pathways open to them, and to help them reach their own decisions, ensuring that these decisions are well-informed and well-thought-through. The skills required, in short, are not diagnostic but facilitative; they are concerned less with the content of the decisions than with the process of decision-making. As Martin Katz[4] succinctly put it, they are focused not on helping pupils to *make wise decisions* (with the assumption that the adviser knows what these should be) but with helping them to *make decisions wisely*.

[4] Katz, M. (1969). Can computers make guidance decisions for students? *College Board Review*, 62, Summer.

Counselling, however, is of limited value – or at least is likely to be a very lengthy and therefore expensive process – if it takes place in a vacuum. Whereas advice can in principle be offered to pupils who know little about the pathways between which they are choosing, helping pupils to make their own decisions requires that they know about these pathways, and have some conceptual frameworks, a range of experiences, and appropriate skills, to draw upon. Such concepts, experiences and skills may develop to some extent in the normal process of social maturation. Indeed, the chief insight generated by the seminal research of writers like Donald Super[5], is that this is the way they do develop, and that career development can only be understood in terms of this process. But it is possible that this process can be facilitated, accelerated and enriched by programmes of deliberate intervention. This is a learning task, which merits a place in the school curriculum.

Stage 3: Curriculum

When schools move to this curriculum stage, a profound change takes place. Up to this point, careers work has been an essentially peripheral activity in the school. Schools traditionally consist basically of interview rooms but of classrooms, and function by facilitating group learning in those classrooms. Once schools conceive of careers work as having a place in the curriculum, it ceases to be something which happens only on the boundary of the school, and instead becomes part of the school's central activity. The change represents the school's recognition that one of its core aims should be to help pupils develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need not only to choose their immediate pathways but to manage and develop their careers throughout their lives. The focus moves from helping them to *choose* a career to helping them to *construct* a career.

In its limited form, the curriculum stage may be confined to talks about occupations and the like. In its richer forms, it covers the four areas of career education represented in the DOTS model:

- *Self awareness*: what kind of person am I; what kind of person do I want to become?
- *Opportunity awareness*: what is the world of work like; how is it structured; what demands do different forms of work make, and what satisfactions do they offer; what is their relationship with different learning pathways?
- *Decision learning*: how do I make decisions; how can I explore alternative options; how do I balance the desirability of options against the probability of achieving them; how do I develop contingency plans?
- *Transition learning*: how do I gain access to particular courses and jobs; how can I present myself effectively in written applications and selection interviews; how can I prepare to cope with transitions?

[5] Super, D.E. (1957). *The Psychology of Careers.* New York: Harper & Row.

It also moves from didactic transmission of information to experiential forms of learning, including small-group work, individual projects, and role-play. In many countries, the Real Game, initially developed in Canada, has played an important role in helping teachers to develop career education programmes based on more active forms of learning. This is important. Mark Savickas[6] has recently suggested that key aspects of career adaptability include what he calls 'career control' (a belief that we are each responsible for constructing our own careers) and 'career curiosity' (a willingness to explore possible selves in possible futures and to be open to new experiences). Only active forms of learning are likely to develop such attributes.

Such programmes may also include opportunities for pupils to experience different parts of the world of work, whether through simulations inside the school (production-line simulations, business games, mini-enterprises) or through various forms of work visits, work shadowing and work experience in real workplaces. An important point to make here is that a single experience is not enough: it is too specific, it may have an excessive impact (whether positive or negative), and too much is loaded on it. In Denmark and Norway, for example, most students have at least two one-week work-experience placements; in Sweden, they used to have three, in each of the three main sectors of the economy (manufacturing, services, social services). This enables pupils to explore the similarities and differences between different work roles and work environments, and to develop constructs through which they can interrogate and seek to understand the wider world of work.

Career education can be included in the curriculum as a separate subject, or incorporated into a wider subject. In the UK, for example, it is most commonly incorporated into personal, social and health education. Alternatively, it can be integrated across the curriculum. This leads us to the final stage: integration.

Stage 4: Integration

In our original work, Bill Law and I saw integration as the summit: as representing the stage when careers work is so effectively infused across the school that it ceases to be a separate entity within it. I know some special schools, for example, where this is true. But in general, I think it is a case where the best can be the enemy of the good. Experience in the UK of trying to implement career education as a cross-curricular theme showed the difficulties of doing so.[7] In the OECD Career Guidance Policy Review, we noted in one of the country reports that it tended to be a thin veil hiding a bare cupboard.[8] This does not mean that such infusion should not be attempted. But to depend upon it as the main model of delivery requires a high level of co-ordination and support to be effective. And

[6] Savickas, M. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. In Brown, S.D. & Lent, R.W. (eds.): *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work*, pp.42-70. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

[7] Whitty, G., Rowe, G. & Aggleton, P. (1994). Subjects and themes in the secondary-school curriculum. *Research Papers in Education, 9(2),* 159-181.

[8] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2002). *Career Guidance Policy Review: Country Note on Norway.* Paris: OECD.

even then it arguably needs to be complemented by some separate provision where the student is helped to make personal sense of the pieces and to pull them together.

On the other hand, in our OECD review[9] we noted that in some school systems systematic effort were made to involve all or most teachers in delivering parts of the career education programme through tutorial or homeroom programmes. We also noted the growth of profiling and portfolio systems designed to encourage pupils to manage their own learning and to see its relationship with their career plans, and the fact that this too was often linked to tutorial or homeroom structures. The skills potentially developed by such systems, of reviewing, reflecting and action planning, arguably lie at the heart of career management skills. Such systems can accordingly provide a powerful way of enabling pupils to develop and practise these skills.

These integrated approaches to careers work have implications for the organisation of the school, and for the distribution of resources within the school. For example, portfolio systems need to be allocated curriculum time for supported reflection, on a group and (preferably) individual basis. Without such support, these systems can easily degenerate into mere paper systems, and their potential as career development processes can be lost. Again, the involvement of teachers in guidance programmes, whether as career education teachers, or as supports for profiling and portfolio systems, or in tutorial or homeroom roles, has considerable implications both for initial teacher education and for ongoing staff development if programmes are to be of high quality.

Beyond this 'whole-school guidance' sub-stage, Bill Law and I also identified a 'community guidance' sub-stage in which efforts are made to involve the wider community in the provision of guidance within the school. This includes the involvement of employers not only in offering work experience, but also as mentors and in other ways. In addition, it includes the active involvement of parents, former pupils and other community representatives.

Parents are crucial, partly because they often have such a strong influence on their own children's decisions, and partly because they commonly are well-predisposed to provide resources for other pupils. In the OECD review, we found a number of strategies to ensure that parents' influence on their children's career choices was well-informed, and supportive rather than controlling. In the USA, for example, the Puente programme, created to help Latino students complete high school and become eligible for public colleges and universities in California, includes parent groups, partly to educate parents about college and its requirements, and partly to get parents to 'let go' of their children; it also often takes parents on trips to local colleges. Again, in New Brunswick in Canada, where many recipients of welfare support are single parents with adolescent children, workshops are being provided to help these parents understand career development issues and to assist them in supporting their teenagers as learners and workers. It is hoped that the workshops will also motivate and bring a sense of optimism to the parents

[9] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004). *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap.* Paris: OECD.

themselves. The initiative represents, in effect, a 'family learning' approach to career development.

An example of a systematic attempt to implement both the school guidance and the community guidance sub-stages is the guidance-oriented school (*l'école orientante*) in Quebec, Canada. A further example, also from Canada, is Ontario, where all school principals are required not only to develop a comprehensive written guidance and career education programme plan, but also, every three years, to conduct a survey of students, parents, teachers and other partners to evaluate the delivery and effectiveness of all components of the programme.

Organisational models

In terms of these different conceptions of careers work, how do different school systems arrange and organise such work? There are, in essence, four different models.

One is to locate the responsibility with specialists who are based outside the school. These specialists may be based in education authorities, as in the case of the *conseillers d'orientation* in France. Or they may be based in labour-market authorities, as in Germany where until fairly recently vocational guidance could only legally be offered by the Federal Employment Service. In both cases, the specialists go into schools, to offer interviews and the like, but they do so from an external base. One of the consequences is that career education is either offered through workshops and short intensive courses located outside the normal curriculum, as in France, or is located within vocational education and separated from career guidance, as in Germany.

A second model is to locate the responsibility with specialists based inside the school. These may be called, for example, school counsellors or guidance counsellors; the nearest example in Australia is the role of guidance officers in Queensland. In some cases they have been previously trained as teachers, but in some cases not. They usually do not do any teaching themselves. They may support other teachers in implementing career education within the curriculum. But their own work tends to be based heavily on interviews, which in many countries are linked to psychometric testing.

In our international studies, we found this model particularly prevalent in the World Bank study of middle-income countries (which included such countries as Chile, the Philippines and Russia).[10] Usually the role was a broad one, including not only educational and career guidance but also personal and social guidance. Within it, career guidance tended often to be marginalised, in two respects:

- The guidance counsellors tended to spend much of their time on the learning and behavioural problems of a minority of pupils, at the expense of the help needed by all pupils in relation to their educational and vocational choices.

[10] Watts, A.G. & Fretwell, D. (2004). *Public Policies for Career Development.* Washington, DC: World Bank.

- Guidance on such choices tends to focus mainly on immediate educational decisions, rather than on occupational decisions and on longer-term career implications.

Moreover, such educational and career guidance as was offered was based heavily on psychometric tests. In stark contrast, remarkably little career information was available: the mass of information which we take for granted in most developed economies was simply not available. And such information resources as were available were often not made accessible to pupils, but were kept by the guidance counsellors in their offices, for fear that the pupils might lose them or mis-use them.

In other words, the model was based essentially on a traditional expert model, in which the role of the specialist is to diagnose and prescribe. In more developed countries, this has been increasingly replaced by a more open professional model, in which a more varied range of interventions is used (including curriculum programmes, ICT and the like), more attention is given to working with and through networks of other individuals and agencies (e.g. supporting the guidance roles of teachers, parents and other members of the community), and there is a greater emphasis on the pupils as an active agent, rather than a passive recipient, within the guidance process.[11] In this model, the specialists need to be viewed as consultants as well as direct service providers. This has significant implications for their training, which needs to include curriculum, consultancy and community liaison skills, as well as interviewing skills.

The third model is a variant of this, which is to give the main specialist responsibility to a teacher. The advantage of this is that teachers often carry more credibility within schools, and find it easier to involve other teachers in their work. The disadvantages are four-fold:

- Often it is a role thrust upon individuals rather than chosen by them.
- They usually are expected to carry on teaching their academic subjects, and so have limited time available for their guidance role.
- The specialist training tends to be limited, and sometimes non-existent.
- Many people stay in the role only for a short period of time before moving on to something else.

There are of course exceptions: some people stay in the role for some time, build up considerable expertise, and are able to develop high-quality programmes in their schools. But they tend to be the exception rather than the rule.

The fourth and final model is in effect a blending of the first and third models. It is based on a partnership between a career guidance specialist based outside the school and a careers co-ordinator based inside the school. In the OECD review, we were impressed by this model, partly because it seemed to address three weaknesses which we found in most if not all wholly school-based systems:

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[11] Watts, A.G., Guichard, J., Plant, P. & Rodriguez, M.L. (1993). *Educational and Vocational Guidance in the European Community.* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

- Their weak links with the labour market, and their tendency to view educational choices as ends in themselves without attending to their longer-term career implications.
- Their lack of impartiality, and the tendency for schools to promote their own provision rather than alternative pathways.
- Their lack of consistency: the policy levers on schools to deliver services in this area tend to be weak, and services to be patchy both in extent and in quality.

On the other hand, it also avoided the limitations of the wholly external model: the lack of ongoing contact with pupils, and of access to the curriculum. The partnership model is the one we have had in the UK. It remains strong in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Ironically, we appear to be abandoning it in England, not by design but by default.[12] On the other hand, in the wake of the OECD review, the partnership model is currently being adopted in Denmark, which previously had a wholly school-based model of delivery.

Implications for Australia and for Victoria

So what are the implications of all this for Australia in general and for Victoria in particular? In the OECD country note on Australia[13], we noted two key elements of strong careers programmes within schools:

- Active support from the school principal.
- The presence on the school staff of at least one well-respected career guidance expert with appropriate training and expertise.

Certainly the views of school principals and senior managers within schools are crucial. In a NICEC study in the UK of senior managers' attitudes to careers work[14], it was clear that their views were significantly influenced by their perceptions of the value of careers work in relation to the school's core task of raising achievement, as measured in examinations or achievement tests. Three positions were identified:

- The *positively supportive* view: that not only is good-quality careers work of value to pupils in its own right but also, by enhancing pupils' motivation, it makes a positive contribution to the school's work of raising achievement.
- The *neutral* view: that good-quality careers work is of value to pupils in helping them with key decisions and transitions but has little or no impact on other aspects of schooling.

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[12] Watts, A.G. (2005). Career education and guidance: prospect and potential. *Careers Education and Guidance*, October, 4-9.

[13] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2002). *Career Guidance Policy Review: Country Note on Australia.* Paris: OECD.

[14] Andrews, D., Law, B., McGowan, B. & Munro, M. (1998). *Managing Careers Work in Schools.* NICEC Project Report. Cambridge: Careers Research and Advisory Centre.

- The *distractive* view: that although careers work may be worthwhile in itself, it represents a distraction from the school's main agenda of raising achievement, consuming time and resources that might more fruitfully have been directed to mainstream teaching activities.

The study found that where the positively supportive view was held, *whole-school* strategies tended to be adopted; that where the neutral view was held, careers work tended to be *segmented* as a separate activity; and that where the distractive view was held, it tended to be *marginalised*. In this connection, it is worth recording that a NICEC review of the research literature on the relationship between careers work and school effectiveness found no evidence that career education and guidance had negative effects on academic attainment or on related variables; instead, the evidence suggested that it had small but positive effects on these variables, as well as being worthwhile in its own right.[15] A recent Scottish study has added to this evidence by demonstrating clear linkages between career goals and academic attainment.[16]

In addition to support from the school principal, expertise within the staff is clearly crucial too. We accordingly recommended in the OECD country note that steps should be taken to ensure that all schools in all states have at least one person on their staff who has had specialist training in career education and guidance, who has a substantial amount of time for this role, and who is able to act as a co-ordinating resource for other staff involved in career-related work in and around the school and to set the standards for this work.

This was linked to some wider recommendations on professional standards. We noted that the extent of professional training in the career guidance field in Australia was widely felt to be inadequate, not only in relation to schools but across the board.

The Commonwealth Government has responded to these comments by supporting a range of initiatives. A package of Australian Career Development Studies has been developed. Work is under way with the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) on developing National Standards for Career Practitioners. A further initiative is the establishment of an Australian Network of Industry Careers Advisers (ANICA) which includes among its aims improving the professional standards of career advice, though the inclusion of 'industry' in the title could raise concerns about whether such advice is to be genuinely impartial.

Here in Victoria, the Managed Individual Pathways programme (MIPs) potentially gives a considerable boost to careers work, particularly if it is viewed as a genuinely universal as well as targeted programme. I hope very much that you will avoid the traps we fell into with Connexions in England, where the universal service was viewed largely as a cloak

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[15] Killeen, J., Sammons, P. & Watts, A.G. (1999). *The Effects of Careers Education and Guidance on Attainment and Associated Behaviour*. Cambridge: National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling.

[16] Inter-Ed (2004). *Career Goals and Educational Attainment: What is the Link?* Glasgow: Careers Scotland.

for the targeted service.[17] Work is well under way on developing a Career and Transition Support Framework which hopefully will locate careers work strongly in relation to the MIPs programme.

Linked to these developments, there is also an interesting issue about whether the establishment of the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), alongside the Commonwealth Government's support for Local Community Partnerships, provide a potential basis for Victoria to move towards establishing networks of professionally qualified Careers Advisors who could work in partnership with schools to deliver impartial career guidance to young people. This would be in line with the findings of the overall OECD review. My own view is that if you could set up such a network, alongside the implementation of the OECD recommendation regarding a well-trained specialist co-ordinator in each school, plus a quality award to be given to all schools whose careers programme meets given standards, you would be in serious business.

Conclusion

Whatever the structure, however, your work will continue to be critically important. As a parent, one of the things I most wanted the school to provide for my son was some sense of direction which would recognise his strengths, harness his motivations, and give him a sense of purpose which would encourage him to study harder and use the facilities which the school had to offer. That it what you can help to provide. Every day you make a difference. Attend to the critics, but don't be deterred by them. Support one another, and believe in the value of what you do.

Professor Tony Watts is Senior Fellow and Life President of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling in Cambridge, England, and Visiting Professor of Career Development at the University of Derby.

[17] Watts, A.G. (2001). Career guidance and social exclusion: a cautionary tale. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 29(2),* 157-176.